Divine Benevolence:

Or, An ATTEMPT to prove that the

PRINCIPAL END

Of the DIVINE

PROVIDENCE *and* GOVERNMENT

IS THE

Happineſs of his Creatures.

BEING

An ANSWER to a Pamphlet, entitled, *Divine Rectitude*; or, *An Inquiry concerning the Moral Perfections of the Deity.*

WITH

A Refutation of the Notions therein advanced concerning Beauty and Order, the Reaſon of Puniſhment, and the Neceſſity of a State of Trial antecedent to perfect Happineſs.

LONDON:

Printed for JOHN NOON, at the *White-Hart* in *Cheapſide*, near *Mercers-Chapel*. MDCCXXXI.

[Price One Shilling.]

INTRODUCTION.

THERE cannot be a controverſy of greater importance, than that which relates to the divine perfections. On our right apprehenſions of theſe religion intirely depends: on theſe all our hopes of happineſs are intirely built. For unleſs we know what God is, and entertain clear conceptions of his perfections, and particularly of his moral attributes, we ſhall neither know how to behave towards him, nor what we are to expect from him according as we do behave: We ſhall be apt to attribute to him thoſe things that are real imperfections, and ſhall very probably be ſadly perplexed in accounting for his various diſpenſations towards mankind. It is a work therefore of great ſervice and uſe to mankind, to put them in a way of thinking more clearly concerning the perfections of God, and avoiding the miſtakes we are apt to fall into relating to this point.

The author of a pamphlet entitled *Divine Rectitude*, &c. has made a laudable attempt of this kind, which I have obſerved to have been greatly commended by perſons whoſe judgments I value; but to me, though there be many things in it which I could join in applauding, yet the general method of his reaſonings appears rather to increaſe than to abate the perplexities of this ſubject, and (which ſeems to me a point of the greateſt conſequence) to render our expectations from the divine being very precarious and uncertain. This, I hope, will be eſteemed a ſufficient vindication of my attempting to reconſider this ſubject, and to make my remarks on the abovementioned diſſertation; in which remarks, I hope, the author of that work will have no reaſon to complain of any deſigned miſrepreſentations of what he ſays, or of any treatment unſuitable to that excellent temper and good ſenſe that diſcovers it ſelf in his performances.

Divine Benevolence.

Section I.

IT has been the common method of thoſe who have treated of the moral perfection of God, to conſider this as diſtinguiſhed into ſeveral attributes; the principal of which are *goodneſs*, *juſtice* and *veracity*. And this has been done, I think, upon the juſteſt ground, becauſe the greater number of true propoſitions we know concerning God: provided each of theſe be clear in themſelves, and really diſtinct from each other; the clearer notion we have of God himſelf, the better we are furniſhed for arguing concerning him, and may more eaſily judge what conduct to expect from him. This is certainly true, though all the moral perfections of God were allowed to be founded in one uniform principle of action. Suppoſe for inſtance, that this principle is moral rectitude, and that God is good,

good, and juſt, and true; becauſe otherwiſe there would be a defect in this his moral rectitude. Yet it is certain, that I know more of God by knowing that he will ever act according to goodneſs, juſtice, and truth or veracity, than if I only knew that he would always act agreeable to the moral fitneſs of things, or as it is fit he ſhould. And from the former I ſhould at leaſt more *readily* and *eaſily* know what to expect from him. It is told me in the word of God, *that Chriſt ſhall judge the world*; now, ſhall not I more readily diſcern the certain truth of this propoſition, if I am aſſured that this is the declaration of him that cannot lie, than if I were only told, that this is ſaid by him that always acts according to moral rectitude? For I can perhaps perceive no moral fitneſs in this, that Chriſt ſhould be the judge of the world. 'Tis true, it may be ſaid, but it is morally fit that God ſhould not deceive and impoſe on his creatures; and therefore it follows from the moral rectitude of the divine being, that ſince he has ſaid it, Chriſt will be the judge. I don't deny it. But yet it's plain, that before you can come to the concluſion, you are obliged to make the divine veracity a medium of your Proof. And the like examples might be eaſily given with reſpect to the other moral perfections of God. Wherefore the leaſt inconveniency that can ariſe from abſtracting from theſe, and reſolving all into moral rectitude,

tude, will be to make our arguments relating to this ſubject more tedious and laborious. If moral rectitude be indeed the foundation of all the moral perfections of God, the moſt proper method of proceedure would be, from hence to deduce goodneſs, juſtice, and veracity, and the like, and then to go on in our enquiries concerning the divine diſpenſations; for till we have clear notions of theſe, and know whether they do, or do not belong to God, I am ſure every one muſt acknowledge that nothing but miſtakes and blunders can be expected in ſuch enquiries; and therefore nothing can be more unreaſonable than deſignedly to abſtract from them, when we are employ'd in theſe diſquiſitions. But to come to the Author of the above-mentioned Diſſertation, whom, for the future, to avoid multiplicity of words, I ſhall call our Author.

He tells us, *P.* 4. that " however we may " divide and diſtinguiſh the moral perfections " of God, according to the different effects, " dealings, and diſpenſations reſulting from " them; yet in themſelves they ſeem to " be but one and the ſame perfection va- " rioufly exerciſed on different objects and " occaſions, and in different caſes and cir- " cumſtances; and cannot therefore, without " error and inconvenience, be conſidered as " diſtinct attributes." This " Perfection is " that of God's determining himſelf by mo- " ral fitneſs, or acting perpetually according

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" to the truth, nature, and reaſon of things;" which is what, in other places, he calls Moral Rectitude. And, in *P.* 30. he tells us, that " his chief aim is to endeavour to ſhew " the convenience and advantage of conſider- " ing the moral perfections of the Deity, un- " der the idea of rectitude, rather than in the " mixed light of many diſtinct attributes."

My deſign, on the other hand, is to ſhow that there is no convenience in this method; but eſpecially to take notice of thoſe errors which he has fallen into, perhaps by adhering to it. As to the former part of this deſign, I have already, in ſome meaſure, prevented my ſelf; but the conſideration of what our author has advanced, in ſupport of his opinion, will give occaſion for ſome farther illuſtration of this point. He ſays the moral attributes of God are really one, and therefore they cannot without error and inconvenience be conſidered as diſtinct. If by their being but one he means only that they may be all comprehended under one general notion, as ſo many diſtinct ſpecies, I don't deny it; but that they are as ſuch, really different, none, I think, can deny; and therefore it does not follow from the general notion in which they may agree, that they cannot, without error and inconvenience, be conſider'd as diſtinct. Is it not plain that the ideas of goodneſs and veracity are diſtinct? May not a perſon be veracious, and yet wicked?

ked? Where then can be the error of conceiving of theſe two attributes as diſtinct, when they really are ſo? If theſe two attributes really belong to God, then two diſtinct moral attributes belong to him; or elſe we muſt mean preciſely the ſame thing, when we ſay of God that he cannot lie, as when we ſay that he is good to all, and his tender mercies are over all his works. And as there is no error in conceiving of the moral attributes of God as diſtinct, ſo neither is there any inconvenience in it, nor any occaſion to have recourſe to our Author's method to eſcape the perplexities to which the other expoſes us, as he aſſerts, *Pag.* 6.

To ſupport which, he repreſents it as common for men to bewilder themſelves in ſearching for the boundaries between divine juſtice and goodneſs: By the one of which, he ſays, is generally underſtood a *communication of bleſſings*; by the other, an *infliction of judgments and calamities*; and then adds, with a note of admiration, as if God were not equally righteous in both diſpenſations.

I can hardly think that any one did ever really entertain this notion of juſtice and goodneſs. To communicate bleſſings may in many caſes ariſe from fooliſh fondneſs and partiality, and have nothing of real goodneſs in it; and to be ſure the infliction of calamities, the cauſing of diſtreſs and miſery may as well be ſuppoſed to ariſe

from malice and ill-nature, as from juſtice.

I can't therefore well underſtand what our author means by perſons puzzling themſelves in ſearching for the boundaries between goodneſs and juſtice, *i. e.* according to the definition he here gives of theſe words, between a communication of bleſſings, and infliction of judgments and calamities.

If any having entertained ſuch an imperfect notion of juſtice and goodneſs have been perplexed in ſearching for the boundaries between them, this does not diſcover any inconvenience in conſidering juſtice and goodneſs as diſtinct, according to the proper ſignification of the words. By the goodneſs of God we ought, I think, to underſtand a *diſpoſition to communicate happineſs to his creatures in general*; ſo that the end of goodneſs is anſwered by every action that produces more happineſs than miſery. By juſtice we are to underſtand *a diſpoſition to take care of the ſupport of the cauſe of virtue and righteouſneſs, by the diſtribution of proper rewards and puniſhments:* And, taking the words in this ſenſe, there is ſo far from being any real, that there is not ſo much as the leaſt ſeeming inconſiſtency between them; nor do theſe attributes, properly ſpeaking, ever ſet bounds or limits to each other; for what juſtice requires, goodneſs cannot forbid, and what goodneſs demands, juſtice cannot oppoſe. 'Tis, indeed, uſual enough

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to repreſent theſe as oppoſite. Juſtice, we ſay, requires the puniſhment of the ſinner, and goodneſs pleads for his pardon. But this is only a popular way of ſpeaking; for juſtice requires the puniſhment of the ſinner only as a means of preſerving the reverence due to the divine laws; and where it is neceſſary for this end, goodneſs cannot oppoſe the puniſhment, becauſe the general happineſs of the creatures of God cannot be ſupported, but by maintaining the authority of his laws: and, on the other hand, where this end can be ſecured without the puniſhment of the guilty, juſtice does not abſolutely require it. Indeed, if we conſider juſtice as implying in it hatred and revenge againſt the ſinner, or ſuppoſe that it obliges to puniſh the guilty, where no better end is anſwered by it, than merely his miſery, which ſeems not to be very different from the opinion of our author, it would then be very difficult, if not impoſſible, to reconcile this with goodneſs; and the belief of two attributes in the divine being, really oppoſite to one another, might eaſily lead us into endleſs perplexities.

But, allowing the afore-mentioned to be the true ideas of divine goodneſs and juſtice, there can no difficulty ariſe from ſuppoſing them both to belong to God, and therefore, from hence, no neceſſity appears of having recourſe to our author's method. But that I may once for all ſhow, that as his method

may, very eaſily, lead us into miſtakes; ſo it cannot poſſibly clear up any difficulty, or give a fair ſolution to any objection, unleſs where, by a round-about way, it at length coincides with the common method, conſider the following inſtance.

Suppoſe a perſon were to object againſt what is ſaid, 2 *Kings, ch.* xx. *ver.* 1. and ſhould ſay, that it could not be the word of God, becauſe it repreſents the prophet as telling *Hezekiah* that he ſhould die of the ſickneſs that was then upon him, whereas we find he recovered, and lived fifteen years afterwards: The difficulty of this objection lies plainly in this, that ſuch an aſſertion being falſe, could not proceed from a being of perfect truth and veracity. Now is it any ways agreeable to the juſt rules of arguing in the ſolution of this difficulty to abſtract from the particular conſideration of the divine veracity, and to appeal to the moral fitneſs of things? Or what could we poſſibly gain by ſuch a conduct, unleſs it were to impoſe on our ſelves or the objector? Suppoſe we could find an hundred reaſons that ſhould prove the fitneſs of the prophet's thus ſpeaking to *Hezekiah*; yet nothing can really take off the force of the objection, but what ſhows that, in the place mentioned, there is nothing ſaid inconſiſtent with the divine veracity; and the like may be ſaid with reſpect to any other difficulties of this nature. If any phænome-

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non be aſſerted, or at firſt view appear contrary to any one of the perfections of God, it is plain, I think, to any perſon that has the leaſt notion of reaſoning, that there can be no way of reconciling the propoſed difficulty; but by ſhowing either that the fact is falſely repreſented, that the perfection to which it is ſaid to be contrary, is not really a perfection of God, or elſe that there is no inconſiſtency between them. But whilſt we allow the perfection really to belong to God, and own the fact that ſeems contrary to it, to deſire a perſon to abſtract from that particular perfection, and to conſider moral rectitude in general, looks more like a deſign to amuſe than inſtruct; at leaſt at firſt view it does not ſeem to be the conduct of a fair arguer.

I have all along hitherto gone upon the ſuppoſition that all the moral attributes of God might be comprehended under the idea of rectitude, or that the whole moral conduct of God is directed by a regard to the reaſon and fitneſs of things. But it ſeems plain to me, that in this deſcription there is ſomething wanting for the full and compleat explication of this point; for did we only know that God will act according to moral rectitude, which in plainer words is only that he will act, *as it is fit he ſhould*, we ſhould hence in no one particular be able to gueſs what conduct to expect from him, unleſs we

are alſo informed what it is in an action which renders it fit to be performed; nor without this can we poſſibly make any uſe of our author's general notion of rectitude. Now, as the deſire of ſome end muſt be the motive to any action, ſo 'tis the nature of the end deſigned, and which the action is proper to effect that renders it good or bad, fit or unfit to be performed. When therefore we ſay, that God is in all his Actions governed by the reaſons and fitneſs of things, we muſt, I think, mean, if we would underſtand ourſelves, that he is moved to every action by a regard to ſome good and valuable end, and always chuſes that way of conduct which is moſt proper to bring about the end deſigned. This ſeems to be the only notion we have of a wiſe and reaſonable action, and *this end* ought to be taken notice of in the deſcription of divine rectitude.

Thus, for inſtance, if you ſuppoſe with me, that the view by which the divine being is directed in all his actions *, is a regard to the greateſt good or happineſs of the univerſe, then the moral rectitude of God may be thus deſcribed, *viz.* That it is a diſpoſition in him to promote the general happineſs of the univerſe: Which definition would in effect be the ſame with that given by our author, if we

* When I ſpeak of the divine actions throughout this diſcourſe, I always mean his actions towards his creatures, though that ſhould not be particularly mentioned.

ſuppoſe that a tendency or fitneſs in things to produce happineſs, or to prevent miſchief, is that which conſtitutes the fitneſs of things; but whatever it be, whether a tendency to promote happineſs, or order and beauty, or the like, that renders actions fit to be performed, this muſt be mentioned in the definition of divine rectitude, if we would have it of any uſe in our inquiries about the divine perfections or conduct; for only to know that God will act according to the fitneſs of things, will make us no wiſer in relation to this matter, than a perſon's knowing that he ought to act according to the fitneſs of things, or, as it is fit he ſhould, will lead him into a right moral conduct. The firſt thing therefore that we have to do before we can determine any thing concerning the moral perfections of God, or hope to ſolve the difficulties relating to the conduct of his providence, is to find out what it is that renders actions fit to be performed, or what is the end that a good and virtuous being, as ſuch, is in purſuit of. And it is to be obſerved, that as we ſhall find this to be one and the ſame, or different and oppoſite, ſo it will appear that God is directed in his moral conduct by one uniform principle or not; for though we have got one word [Rectitude] to expreſs the moral perfections of God by, as we might eaſily find another that ſhould expreſs both his natural and moral ones together; yet that perfection cannot be really one

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and the ſame, that includes in it the deſire of two oppoſite ends. If we ſuppoſe that God deſires the happineſs of his creatures, and at the ſame time the beauty and order of his works, if theſe two principles of action often claſh and interfere, and ſet bounds to each other; this cannot be to repreſent him as governed by one uniform principle, tho' his love of order, and his love of his creatures, be both called moral rectitude: but if his moral rectitude be nothing elſe but a deſire or inclination to preſerve a conſtant regard to the general happineſs of the univerſe in all his actions, then he is in this view repreſented as truly governed by one uniform principle; though we ſhould afterwards find it very convenient to reckon juſtice, veracity, mercy, patience, *&c.* as particular ſpecies or branches of this rectitude. Our author therefore ſeems very far to have ſwerved from the main deſign he profeſſes he had in view; which was to conſider the moral perfection of God under one ſimple notion, rather than in the various and mixed light of many diſtinct attributes; when he ſuppoſes that the rectitude which he repreſents, as comprehending all moral perfections, really includes in it a regard to different and oppoſite ends; and conſequently is only one word contrived to expreſs ſeveral attributes, not only diſtinct from, but many times really oppoſite to one another. Had he, inſtead of thus comprehending

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all the moral attributes of God under one word, ſhown how they are all derived from one uniform principle of action, or how they reſult from the ſuppoſition of the deſire of one uniform end; he had acted much more agreeably to his own pretenſions, and had explained a truth of very great importance in the conſideration of the moral perfections of God; but he ſeems, on the contrary, to have ſtudiouſly endeavoured to find out as many diſtinct reaſons or ends of the divine conduct as poſſible he could, and then ſuppoſes that there be many more, of which we have not the leaſt notion or conception. Now, can any one think that he repreſents the moral perfections of God in a diſtinct and unmixed light by including them all under the term Rectitude, when at the ſame time he tells us, that this rectitude implies in it a regard to different ends which do often interfere, but how far we know not; and a regard to various other reaſons which we have no conception of? But leſt this ſhould be looked upon as miſrepreſentation, hear what he ſays himſelf. After having obſerved that it is commonly preſumed that the communication of happineſs was the ſole end of God in creating the world, he ſays, *P.* 11. "I ſee no abſurdity in ſuppoſing, that the creator might have various "ends and deſigns of which we have not the "leaſt conception. But not to inſiſt on this, "it deſerves to be conſidered, whether with-"in the compaſs of our own Ideas we may

" not find ſome other intention befitting the " wiſdom and rectitude of the ſupreme be- " ing. We ſeem to have grounds for ſuch a " ſuppoſition both from reaſon and revela- " tion." And again, having repreſented or- der and beauty as an end aimed at in the works of God diſtinct from the happineſs of his creatures, he ſays, *P.* 14. " Where, and " how far theſe ends do in fact interfere, is " above the power of man to determine. But " it does not appear to me, that the order, " beauty, and harmony of the univerſe are " meerly intended in ſubordination to the wel- " fare of creatures; on the contrary, I know " not whether the latter be not ſubordinate " to the former, and limited by it."

I hardly need here obſerve what a melancholy aſpect it would have upon the creatures of God were this ſuppoſition true, that God in creating, and in his acts of providence, has various ends and deſigns diſtinct from, and in ſome reſpect oppoſite to their happineſs; for as of the importance of many of theſe ends, a regard to which may limit his regard to the happineſs of his creatures, we know nothing, how can we be ſure that they may not ſo far prevail as entirely to deſtroy it? We are ſure, indeed, that God will act towards us accord- ing to the fitneſs of things; but this fitneſs of things is very different from a fitneſs to pro- duce happineſs, and we muſt be acquainted with various other ends and deſigns of the divine being, before we can judge what it is fit

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for him to do or not to do; and conſequently before we can judge what conduct we are to expect from him. We are apt to flatter our ſelves that God deſigns our happineſs, this is indeed allowed to be a right deſign, but it is not his whole deſign. He may perhaps have various other ends in view, ends for ought we know of much greater importance, and to which the happineſs of his creatures muſt yield. Our author ſeems to ſuppoſe it impoſſible for us to determine how far a regard to the happineſs of his creatures and the other views of the divine being do in fact interfere. I am ſure then 'tis impoſſible that we ſhould be certain that they will not ſo far interfere as wholly to deſtroy it; nor is it poſſible for us in any caſe to know what conduct we are to expect from God, when only one or two of thoſe various ends that regulate his actions are known to us, and we ſuppoſe that there are various other ends, which may have as powerful influence, and may interfere with theſe. When therefore ſuch melancholy conſequences plainly ariſe from this notion, tho' it be no direct diſproof of it; yet thus much will be gained by it, that I ſhall have every good-natured man ſo far on my ſide, as to wiſh it might prove falſe; and I may expect to be heard without prejudice, whilſt diſputing againſt an opinion, which, if true, would have ſuch an ill aſpect even upon good men.

Section II.

This therefore I ſhall now ſet my ſelf to do, and endeavour in oppoſition to it to prove theſe two points, 1. That God in his acts of creation and providence had a regard to the happineſs of his creatures, and that he is really benevolent towards them. And, 2. That we have no reaſon to ſuppoſe that he is in his actions towards them influenced by any other principles; at leaſt, by any other, that are not entirely coincident with, or perfectly ſubordinate to this. The former of theſe propoſitions I might omit the proof of, becauſe it is not expreſly denied by our author, and very plainly follows from ſome of his conceſſions; but as this is indeed a point of the higheſt importance, and ought to be proved before we come to conſider the latter, I was unwilling wholly to paſs it over. Now the only ways in which this point can be made out, are either from reaſon or experience: By reaſon, from the obſervations of the works of God, we juſtly conclude that he is a moſt wiſe, and powerful, and infinitely perfect being; and ſuch a being can't be ſuppoſed any ways indigent, but muſt be perfectly happy, being liable to no infelicity from ignorance or weakneſs; and conſequently he can't be influenced to do evil, or to leſſen the happineſs of his creatures from any interfering of their intereſts with his. Hence it is plain, that the creatures of God have no rea-

ſon to fear any injurious treatment from him.

Thus far, I think, the caſe is very plain, but it is commonly apprehended that the goodneſs of God may from the foregoing principles be more ſtrictly demonſtrated after the following manner: The divine being, as infinitely wiſe, muſt be perfectly acquainted with the true nature and relation of things, muſt always know what is fit and proper to be done; and having no paſſions nor temptations to draw him aſide from what is in it ſelf reaſonable and fit, muſt in every caſe act accordingly. But to make a good or innocent being miſerable, is a thing in its own nature always unfit and unreaſonable, and to communicate happineſs to ſuch kinds of beings, is always agreeable to reaſon; and therefore we may certainly conclude that God will conduct himſelf in this manner towards his creatures. I will not pretend to ſay that this argument is fallacious, but there is one part of it that to me is not ſo clear as I could wiſh. When it is aſſerted that to communicate happineſs is a thing in it ſelf fit and reaſonable, I am at a loſs to know what is the meaning of the expreſſion. An action is, I think, then *reaſonable*, when there is a good reaſon for the performing it. But if we thus underſtand it in the foregoing argument, there is ſomething ſtill wanting to compleat the demonſtration; for it may then be juſtly aſk'd, what is the reaſon why God ſhould communicate happineſs to the good and innocent?

nocent? Will you ſay that the reaſon for it is that ſuch a proceedure is agreeable, and the contrary oppoſite to the nature of things? If ſo, I ſhould then aſk to what things is ſuch a proceedure agreeable to the nature of? Is it to that of the creatures? Is it agreeable to their nature as ſenſible beings? It is certainly pleaſing to them as ſuch; but this is entirely beſides the queſtion, and abſtracting from this ſenſe of the word, I don't ſee but that pain and miſery is as agreeable to the nature of a ſenſible being, as pleaſure and happineſs. Is then ſuch a proceedure agreeable to the nature of the divine being, and the contrary oppoſite to it? It certainly is if we ſuppoſe him benevolent; but this is begging the queſtion: Or will you ſay it is agreeable to his nature, as a wiſe and intelligent being, without conſidering whether he is really benevolent or not? I ſhould be extreamly pleaſed to ſee this proved, becauſe nothing could then be a ſtronger demonſtration of the divine goodneſs. But to do this, is at preſent beyond my ſkill. I don't find (I am ſorry to ſay it) any neceſſary connexion between mere intelligence, though ever ſo great, and the love or approbation of kind and beneficent actions. I muſt therefore leave this proof to better hands, and content my ſelf with ſhowing in a more popular way, that God is really benevolent, without pretending to diſcover the reaſon why he is ſo. And to this purpoſe I would obſerve it as matter of fact, that God has

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made many beings capable of very great happineſs, and that he has plainly made, if we only conſider this world, very plentiful proviſion for their happineſs. Now it is not conceivable with what view he has done this, if not with a deſign to promote their happineſs. He muſt do it either with an intention to communicate happineſs or miſery to them, ſince we don't ſuppoſe that his felicity has any dependance on his creatures, or elſe with no view or deſign at all; for that action, by which the happineſs or miſery of no one being in the univerſe is promoted, is in effect the ſame as none at all. But we can't ſuppoſe that God deſigned the miſery of his creatures; to ſuſpect this, nothing in our minds, nothing in the appearances of things, gives us any reaſon: We muſt therefore conclude that it was with an intention to communicate happineſs that the univerſe was created, and that the divine being is really moſt benevolent and kind to his creatures; and in this concluſion we ſhall be abundantly confirmed by obſerving the works of God. Take notice of them, and where you admire their curious and beautiful contrivance, you will always obſerve the marks of goodneſs as well as wiſdom. Some particular appearances it may perhaps be hard to reconcile to our ideas of perfect goodneſs, but we ſhall ordinarily find that theſe are the effects of general laws, that in the main are uſeful and beneficial; and it is not to be expected but that we, who have but

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very imperfect views of things, ſhould ſometimes meet with difficulties that we can't eaſily account for, though we ſhall never find any that really overthrow our notion of a perfectly good and benevolent Deity.

Beſides this, it is plain that we are ſo formed as neceſſarily to approve of kind and beneficent actions, and to diſlike a cruel and barbarous character. If this is a conſequence of our being intelligent and rational creatures, God alſo is infinitely wiſe, and therefore infinitely good; but if we cannot ſee this connexion between intelligence and goodneſs, or an approbation of what is kind and benevolent: yet our being thus formed, is a ſtrong proof that our Creator is really good, ſince nothing can be a greater ſecurity to the general happineſs than this; and a being that had no regard to the happineſs of his creatures, would never have made the moſt ſublime and ſatisfying pleaſures the conſtant attendants of kind and beneficent actions. We have, I think, from ſuch conſiderations as theſe, the juſteſt reaſon to be aſſured that the divine being is really benevolent, or does intend the general happineſs of his creatures. I put theſe as equivalent expreſſions, becauſe I ſuppoſe he would not deſign their happineſs, if he did not deſire it, but ſhould be full as well pleaſed to ſee them all *ruined* and *miſerable*. But our author has nicely diſtinguiſhed theſe two things: He freely owns that God intends the happineſs of his creatures,

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but ſeems very unwilling to allow him to be benevolent at all. He ſuppoſes he does good to them, not becauſe he deſires their happineſs, but becauſe ſuch a conduct is agreeable to the reaſons and natures of things. As if ſuppoſing the divine being perfectly indifferent to the happineſs or miſery of his creatures, there could be any reaſon why he ſhould chooſe one rather than the other. But let us hear what our author has ſaid himſelf on this head: "I cannot avoid thinking "(ſays he, *P.* 9.) that the divine goodneſs is "very much miſapprehended, when it is "conſidered as a phyſical propenſion, or diſ-"poſition of nature analogous to thoſe af-"fections and propenſities which he has gi-"ven us; ſuch a diſpoſition would be ſo far "from conſtituting moral goodneſs, that it "would derogate from it in proportion to "its influence. To ſuppoſe in the Deity a "benevolent diſpoſition neceſſary in it ſelf "and in its operations, is to ſuppoſe what is "utterly inconſiſtent with the perfections of "the Creator, and the obligations of his crea-"tures. And ſuppoſing it did not neceſſarily "produce beneficent actions, but to be con-"ſiſtent with freedom and choice; yet ſtill, "in proportion to the extent of its influence, "it would depreciate good actions, and de-"tract from the merit of the agent."

What would be the conſequence of ſuppoſing ſuch a benevolent diſpoſition in the Deity, as would deſtroy the freedom of his actions I

am no ways concerned to mind; ſince all I contend for is, that God is neceſſarily good or benevolent, and this no more deſtroys his liberty, than his love of order and abhorrence of confuſion, which is allowed by our author to be in the Deity, as unwilling as he is to own that he has any love to his creatures. Now againſt ſuch a neceſſary benevolence he has ſaid nothing, but that according to the extent of its influence, it would *depreciate good actions, and detract from the merit of the agent.* I can't but obſerve here, that by the ſame way of reaſoning exactly he might prove that there is a contrary diſpoſition in the divine being; for that would enhance the value of good actions, and exalt the merit of the agent; and his illuſtration of his argument from moral goodneſs in men, will as well ſuit this caſe as the other. If a perſon producing a certain quantity of beneficence, has the greater moral merit the leſs he is ſuppoſed influenced by benevolence; and if we ſuppoſe him entirely without any natural affection, his moral merit would ſtill be increaſed: by parity of reaſon, 'tis certain it muſt follow, that to produce the ſame quantity of beneficence with a contrary natural diſpoſition, muſt imply ſtill a much higher degree of moral merit. But it is, I think, plain enough that there is no great force in ſuch reaſoning as this; for in what ſenſe does the ſuppoſition of benevolence in the divine being depreciate his good actions? Does it

render them leſs fit to be performed? This certainly can't be ſaid, conſequently the actions are full as good in themſelves, as if he were altogether deſtitute of benevolence. Or does the performance of them imply leſs perfection in him? This will probably be ſaid, becauſe the more he is ſuppoſed influenced by benevolence, the leſs he appears to regard the moral fitneſs of things, or moral rectitude. This indeed might be the conſequence, if actions were not therefore fit to be performed, becauſe they have a tendency to promote happineſs; or, which is the ſame thing, if benevolence were not the main part of divine rectitude, which ſeems to be a point extremely plain, and is very agreeable to the conceſſions of our author. He owns it is intrinſically right and fit for God to communicate happineſs to his creatures; if ſo, to deſire their happineſs, muſt be a right affection, and conſequently there would be a defect in the divine rectitude if he were not benevolent. But for what reaſon ſhould I go about to ſhow that the perfection of the divine being is no ways leſſen'd by ſuppoſing benevolence to be the principle of his actions, when 'tis plain that we hardly have any other notion of a good and amiable action, but that it proceeds from this principle? If kindneſs or a good diſpoſition be not the ſpring, no matter what the nature or conſequence of the action be, however beneficial it may be to us, we like the being that produced it never

the better; we don't think our ſelves obliged to gratitude, or imagine him any ways the more perfect, as to his moral character on the account of it.

As to the other part of the objection againſt this truth, that it detracts from the divine merit to ſuppoſe him influenced by benevolence, I confeſs I really don't well underſtand it, and therefore can't give a particular anſwer to it. But if there be ſenſe in ſaying that the divine being merits by any of his actions, kind and benevolent actions ſurely can't be the leaſt meritorious. However, we may allow our author his own way of reaſoning, and ſuppoſe that neceſſary benevolence in the divine being depreciates the value of his actions, and detracts from his merit as much as he pleaſes. But does it do this any otherwiſe than as it adds to perfection of his nature? If the more imperfect any being is, whether it be by want of benevolence or ability, though he ſhould merit the more by the ſame good actions, does it yet follow for this reaſon that we are conſulting the honour of any one by denying or leſſening his natural perfections, in order to inhance the merit of his actions? In this caſe we may more admire the actions, but in the other ſhall more admire and love the being that was the author of them. If God have no benevolent diſpoſition towards his creatures, 'tis indeed vaſtly admirable that he ſhould be ſo conſtant in doing good to them; but ſtill if they had juſt reaſon to apprehend

prehend that all the good they receive from him was very far from being the effect of any real kindneſs to them, they could not, I think, according to the preſent conſtitution of our nature, be hence induced to love or gratitude. Take away the ſuppoſition of the divine benevolence, and he no longer appears amiable and lovely, he no longer remains the object of our truſt and confidence; other perfections render him awful and great, but 'tis this alone renders him the delightful object of our contemplation and truſt.

SECTION III.

This point therefore being, I hope, ſufficiently clear, *viz.* That we ought to conceive of God as truly benevolent. I come now to conſider whether we have any reaſon to imagine that he is actuated by any other principles diſtinct from this, or which are in any caſe oppoſite to it; and that he is not, will ſufficiently be manifeſted, if it ſhould appear that to a wiſe and rational being thoſe things that have no relation to happineſs, muſt neceſſarily be looked upon as indifferent. In order to make out which, let us ſuppoſe a perſon entirely unconcerned with any ſenſible being whatſoever, and ſee if you can obſerve any reaſon why he ſhould at any time act contrary to his own happineſs, or eſteem any actions fit and proper to be performed that are not conducive to his own felicity. For it's plain, ſince we ſuppoſe him to be a ſolitary being,

being, that has no connexion with any other, no desire of their happiness or influence upon it, his condition can't be rendered better or worse, more or less eligible, but by that which increases or diminishes his own happiness; for what reason then can he chuse or approve of any action, but as it tends to this end? I don't deny but such a solitary being might have various inclinations and affections distinct from a calm regard to his own interest, some of which might engage him to do things whereby his own real happiness would be diminished. He might be led also by the constitution of his nature to approve of some actions as amiable and decent, without thinking of their tendency to happiness; but then, if he acted as a wise and rational being, he would reflect on these his inclinations, and affections, and determinations of his mind, and as far as he found that they were really prejudicial to him, so far he would be willing to alter and correct them: nor can any one possibly blame him for such a conduct, since being supposed to have no concern with any other sensible beings, he can't regard them; and on his own account, nothing can be eligible but what is conducive to his happiness. 'Tis easy to say that some actions are fit and reasonable in themselves, without any regard to happiness, on which account they ought to be performed; but really to conceive of any such fitness in the case of the being we have supposed is, I think, absolutely impos-

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ſible. For what is it can render an action fit to be performed, but the effects it tends to produce? and what can any effect be to ſuch a ſolitary being, that is not an addition or diminution to his happineſs? Does not every one at firſt view ſee, that to him it is to all intents and purpoſes the very ſame as none at all, and therefore muſt be utterly unworthy of his choice?

Beſides, if this being could be reaſonably influenced by any motives not entirely ſubordinate to a regard to his own happineſs, theſe motives muſt have ſome weight even in oppoſition to it; otherwiſe their force will (if I may ſo ſpeak) be infinitely ſmall, or nothing: and from hence it would follow, that a perſon may have juſt reaſon to do thoſe actions that will be hurtful to himſelf, when he knows no one being in the world can be the better for them. But if ſuch a conduct can be fit and reaſonable in it ſelf, it would puzzle the wiſeſt head to tell what can be abſurd and fooliſh. And if it be allowed that there are ſome reaſons which may juſtly ſway with me to prejudice my ſelf where none receives any advantage by it; ſince I can't be obliged to have a greater regard to another than my ſelf, the ſame, or like reaſons, may juſtly incline me to hurt him, where neither I, nor any one beſides receives any advantage from what he ſuffers; which poſitions make morality, inſtead of conſiſting in following the dictates of a regular ſelf-love and real benevolence, to be

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an obedience to thoſe reaſons, which every ſenſible and benevolent mind muſt wiſh ſhould often be diſregarded.

Now, if it be allowed me that ſuch a ſolitary being as has been ſuppoſed cannot reaſonably act but from a view to his own happineſs, it is plain that the ſame thing muſt hold true of all other beings with reſpect to that part of their conduct in which none beſides themſelves have any concern, *i. e.* which does good or harm to none beſides themſelves; and therefore all actions which produce neither happineſs nor miſery, either immediately or in their natural tendency, muſt be abſolutely indifferent.

But ſurely this is a propoſition that need not be enlarged upon, ſince an indifferent action, and one that does neither good nor harm, ſeem to be phraſes that only differ in ſound, when in ſenſe they are exactly the ſame; and a perſon that can chuſe to buſy himſelf in ſuch actions as theſe, ſeems to be ſomething beneath the character of a fool. And yet the conceſſion of this one principle will certainly go a great way towards confuting this notion of our author. For if actions doing neither good nor harm are indifferent, and even according to him it is *cæt. par.* reaſonable and fit to produce happineſs and to prevent miſery, the rectitude or obliquity of actions muſt altogether conſiſt in their tendency to produce happineſs or miſery. Thoſe actions that have no good tendency, but only occaſion

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misery, must always be evil; and those only are really good in themselves, that produce more happiness than misery; the former therefore can never be chosen, but by a malicious or mistaken being.

And for this reason we may safely conclude, that the divine being is *by no consideration whatsoever* inclined to lessen the happiness of his creatures; but that whenever he inflicts evils on particular persons, or societies, it is for the sake of a greater or more general benefit: for since he himself can receive no advantage by hurting his creatures, since there can't be supposed to be any competition of interests between him and them; his method of conduct towards them must be regulated solely by a regard to their general happiness, if we suppose any good design in it at all.

Now such a notion of the divine conduct as this, renders him really most amiable, and lays all his creatures under the strongest obligations to love, gratitude, and obedience, and is the firmest foundation of our trust and dependence upon him: But to imagine that he would do infinitely more good to his creatures than he does, were it not for other motives, by which he is influenced in opposition to their happiness, destroys the glory of his goodness, and renders all our expectations from him perfectly uncertain.

SECTION IV.

After what has been said, I think, I might leave the controversy with any unprejudiced

perſon; but as it ſeems to me to be one of the greateſt importance, I am unwilling to paſs by any thing, that has been advanced by our author in favour of the oppoſite ſentiment, without a particular anſwer. I ſhall therefore now ſet my ſelf to conſider the ſeveral *reaſons* of the divine conduct, that he has mentioned, and repreſented as *entirely diſtinct* from a regard to the happineſs of his creatures; and if I can plainly ſhow that none of theſe can be ſuch *diſtinct reaſons* of his acting, it will follow at leaſt that he has not proved his point, but has left the matter as he found it, and ſtill it may be true for any thing he has ſaid to the contrary, that happineſs only is the end of God in his works.

His firſt inſtance is the regard which God has to beauty and order in his works. This our author repreſents, as an end which the divine being purſues, entirely diſtinct from, and in a great meaſure oppoſite to the creatures happineſs. "It may ſafely be preſumed, (ſays he, *P.* 14.) "that the Deity neceſſarily loves order, and abhors "confuſion. Were it poſſible that deformity "and diſorder could be more conducive to the "happineſs of his creatures than the contrary; "even upon this ſuppoſition it ſeems not pro-"bable that they would have been ſubmitted to." And afterwards he tells us, that he apprehends theſe two ends a regard to happineſs, and regard to order and beauty do ſometimes interfere, and that the former is rather ſubordinate to the latter than contrarywiſe.

I am ſenſible it could not but appear very odd, ſhould I, in oppoſition to this ſentiment of

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our author, aſſert, that God had no regard to order and beauty in his works; neither do I ſay that, I only deny that this was an end of his acting diſtinct from the happineſs of his creatures, and on the contrary affirm, that it was a regard to their felicity which was the reaſon why he has made and diſpoſes of all things in ſo orderly and beautiful a manner. It is very plain, that the beauty and regularity of the divine works does contribute to happineſs; and it is impoſſible for any one to imagine that irregularity and confuſion ſhould anſwer this end as well as the contrary: This therefore is a plain reaſon why the beauty of any work is eſteemed a recommendation of it; nor is it, I think, poſſible for us to find out any other excellency in the moſt beautiful object, beſides its tendency to give pleaſure in the contemplation, or to promote ſome other uſeful purpoſe. If there be, why are we not informed what that excellency is? To ſay that ſuch objects are in themſelves more perfect than others, is only to deliver your opinion that they are truly excellent. I alſo am of opinion that they are excellent; my reaſon for it is, that they give delight in the contemplation of them, or are ſome ways beneficial; and any further than they tend to theſe ends, can imagine no perfection, no excellency in them. Beauty in any object ſeems to be nothing elſe, but *ſuch a relation, order and proportion of its parts, as renders the contemplation of it agreeable:* In the object it ſelf therefore 'tis nothing elſe; but a certain relation, order, and proportion of its parts. Now, I appeal to any one, whether he can poſſibly con-

ceive of any objects being the more perfect meerly on the account of the order and proportion of its parts, any farther than as that order and proportion renders it more agreeable or more uſeful, *i. e.* any farther than that order and proportion contributes to happineſs; and if this be true, 'tis plain that the divine being could never deſign beauty in his works, but in order to promote happineſs. But let us fairly examine what our author has ſaid to prove the contrary: And here his firſt argument is drawn from ſcripture, where God is ſaid to have created all things *for his own glory*. By this I underſtand that in all his works he deſigned the illuſtration of his own perfections, that his creatures might diſcern and adore his infinite excellencies; but then he cannot be ſuppoſed to have done this for his own ſake, for he cannot be profited by the praiſes and applauſes of his creatures. For what then? undoubtedly for the happineſs of his creatures themſelves, whoſe glory and happineſs it is to know, and love, and ſerve their great Creator. This phraſe therefore thus interpreted is no objection againſt the opinion of thoſe, who ſuppoſe that the end of all God's actions towards his creatures is their happineſs. But our author has given a very different interpretation of it, and ſuppoſes that the glory, for which God created all things, is that glory which conſiſts in the approbation of his own works, *i. e.* as I gather from what follows, in the approbation of his works and actions as perfect and beautiful. This, I confeſs, is a very odd interpretation of

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the word; however, I ſhan't diſpute it; nor do I deny that God did ſo make, and does ſo govern the world, that infinite wiſdom approves of every part of his conduct, and of all his works as the moſt perfect, and if you pleaſe alſo as moſt beautiful; nor will he on any account do that which he can't approve of. But it ſtill remains to be ſhown, that he can approve of any thing in his works that is an hindrance to his creatures happineſs, or that he can approve of that as beautiful which is no ways beneficial; otherwiſe ſuch places of ſcripture as deſcribe God as acting for his own glory, that is, in our author's ſenſe of them, as acting out of regard to his own approbation, do not in the leaſt favour his ſentiments. However, properly ſpeaking, it ſeems plain, that God cannot make his own approbation a diſtinct end in his actions; for a wiſe being deſigns, acts, and approves of his own actions for the very ſame reaſons. His own approbation cannot make his actions more fit to be performed, does not make him think them the more ſo (for that would be to ſuppoſe that he approves becauſe he approves) and therefore cannot be any diſtinct reaſon of his acting. As for thoſe other expreſſions which he has produced from ſcripture, that *God has made all things for himſelf*, and that *for his pleaſure they are, and were created*, I might very well neglect to take any notice of them, ſince he has made no particular uſe of them, nor any ways endeavoured to ſhow how they favour his hypotheſis; eſpecially as I apprehend, that any reader, who is not carried away with the firſt ſound

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of words, cannot poſſibly ſo far miſtake them, as to imagine that they are at all to our author's purpoſe. The firſt of theſe expreſſions I find *Prov.* xvi. 4. *The Lord hath made all things for himſelf: yea, even the wicked for the day of evil.* The meaning of which verſe is, I apprehend, very well expreſſed in biſhop *Patrick*'s paraphraſe of it, "The Lord diſpoſes all things "throughout the world to ſerve ſuch ends as "he thinks fit to deſign, which they cannot re"fuſe to comply with. For if any men be ſo "wicked as to oppoſe his will, he will not loſe "their ſervice; but when he brings a public "calamity on a country, employ them as the "executioners of his wrath *". The other expreſſion is in *Rev.* iv. 11. *Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory, and honour, and power: for thou haſt created all things, and for thy pleaſure they are, and were created.* The meaning of which is, not that God made all things for his own pleaſure, and entertainment, and delight; or, that his own pleaſure was any end of his works of creation or providence: but that all things were made, and do exiſt *by his will.* This is plain in the original, the words of which are, Διὰ τὸ θέλημά σε εἰσὶ καὶ ἐκτίσθησαν.

It would be to abuſe the reader's patience to ſay any thing more to ſhow that theſe texts have no concern in the controverſy before us: As for that other place, where it is ſaid, that *God ſaw*

* Or, if this interpretation be diſliked, we may tranſlate the words thus: The Lord hath made all things ſuited to each other; yea, even the wicked to the day of evil. This Dr. *Clarke* ſays is their proper rendring. *See his Sermons, Vol.* VII. *page* 315.

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every thing that he had made, and behold it was very good, in which by this goodneſs in the works of God, our author ſays, that we muſt needs underſtand ſomething more, than a tendency and conduciveneſs in every thing to the benefit of living creatures, I need only obſerve, that I apprehend he cannot prove that any thing farther is intended, and till that be done, I am not diſpoſed to take it for granted. 'Tis certain things are moſt properly ſaid to be good, becauſe they are fitted to do good, or to promote happineſs. Why then may we not ſuppoſe that this is the reaſon, for which God ſays of the things that he had made, that they were all very good?

But to leave the conſideration of arguments drawn from ſcripture, by which kind of arguments, it is, I apprehend, impoſſible to decide ſuch a controverſy as this, let us proceed to conſider what he has farther obſerved in confirmation of his hypotheſis. And here the ſtrength of his reaſoning ſeems to be this: Order and beauty are real perfections in any work, and conſequently the works of God could not have been ſo perfect, if they had not been ſo beautiful; wherefore, as we cannot but ſuppoſe that the works of God are moſt perfect, he muſt have had a regard to beauty as well as happineſs in them. Here I don't deny the conſequence, the only debate between us is, whether beauty be any inherent perfection in an object, and not merely a ſentiment in our minds, ariſing from ſome particular order and proportion in the parts of the object we contemplate. To

prove

prove that beauty is a real perfection, our author argues from matter of fact, in the following manner, *P.* 16. "If beauty and order "are not real, but relative; if they conſiſt "wholly in an arbitrary agreement between "the object and the ſenſe, what means that "wonderful apparatus, that boundleſs profu- "ſion of art and ſkill, which we every where "meet with among the Creator's works? What "means that curious contexture and elaborate "arrangement of parts? Why are they ſo nice- "ly adjuſted to each other, and all made ſub- "ſervient to the grandeur and magnificence of "the whole? According to the preſent ſuppo- "ſition, how ſhall we avoid looking on all this "as mere waſte of workmanſhip? If there be "no objective perfections, no real improve- "ments hereby introduced, I am forced to con- "clude that a chaos would have anſwered the "purpoſe full as well." This is indeed a very heavy charge laid againſt thoſe that deny the real intrinſic perfection of beautiful objects: They repreſent, according to our author, all that curious art, that fine contrivance which is apparent in the works of God, as mere waſte of workmanſhip, ſince a chaos would have anſwer'd the purpoſe full as well. But this is a charge which I would hope our author himſelf, after more cool deliberation, will not be willing to maintain. Will he ſay, that in all the curious contexture of the parts of the univerſe it was only beauty and not uſe that was intended? Or if he ſhould, will he not be confuted almoſt in every inſtance? Was it uſefulneſs or beauty

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that was chiefly intended in the internal ſtructure of animals and plants? Here 'tis evident that the former was chiefly deſigned; ſince in theſe we can ſee no beauty, but that of exquiſite contrivance to anſwer a kind intention; and yet in this part of the divine workmanſhip, beyond any other, there appears the niceſt art. Nor can there, I believe, be many inſtances given, where we can diſcern beauty in the works of God, and yet ſee no uſe in that contrivance which renders them beautiful. The ingenious author of the inquiry concerning beauty and virtue has obſerved, that that very quality in objects, which occaſions their beauty, would render them more eligible, ſuppoſing we had no ſenſe of beauty at all, *Treat.* 1. *Sect.* 8. *Par.* 2.

Now if this be really the caſe, there can be no reaſon to aſk what occaſion was there for ſuch a profuſion of beauty amidſt the works of God, if there be no other excellency in beautiful objects beſides their tendency to promote happineſs? For the anſwer is very plain. The world is ſo framed, that every particular part of it is of uſe to promote happineſs, and a ſenſe of beauty was given ſtill farther to advance this end. And it muſt be very abſurd to ſay, that all the curious contexture and elaborate arrangement of the parts of the univerſe was upon this ſuppoſition mere waſte of workmanſhip; ſince things were thus ordered to promote the moſt uſeful purpoſes, and no leſs diſplay the benignity than the wiſdom of the Deity. Whether our ſenſe of beauty be arbitrary or not, happineſs alone required that a

regular world ſhould be choſen, rather than a confuſed chaos; and therefore that the world is thus regular, can be no argument that our ſenſe of beauty does not ariſe from the arbitrary conſtitution of the divine being. "But are not "uniformity and variety real relations belonging to the objects themſelves? Are they not "independent on us and our faculties? And "would they not be what they are, whether "we perceived them or no? *P.* 17. There is never any one denied this; yet hence our author ſeems to draw a very ſtrange and ſurprizing concluſion, when he aſſerts, that for this reaſon the author of the inquiry concerning beauty and virtue has fixed beauty on ſuch a foundation, as is entirely inconſiſtent with his own hypotheſis.

His hypotheſis is, that thoſe objects appear beautiful to us, in which there is *uniformity amidſt variety.* He never imagined that uniformity and variety were themſelves beauty, or that objects thus qualified muſt neceſſarily appear beautiful to every rational mind, either of which aſſertions ſeem inconſiſtent with his notions. But he aſſerts it only as matter of fact, that ſuch objects, as are uniformly various, do appear beautiful to us. And this I ſuppoſe none who have examined the matter, but will acknowledge is pretty near the truth.

But what follows from hence? Does it follow becauſe our perception of beauty ariſes from objects uniformly various, and uniformity and variety are real relations belonging to the objects themſelves; that therefore beauty, which it is plain is neither uniformity nor variety, nor

any

any mixture of the two, is a real quality in objects, and not only a ſenſation in our minds, occaſioned by ſomewhat real in objects themſelves. Is it not poſſible that the ſour taſte of vinegar may ariſe from the acuteneſs of its particles? Now ſuppoſing this to be the real caſe, then the acuteneſs of the particles of vinegar are as much the foundation of its ſourneſs, as uniformity and variety are the foundation of beauty. But did ever any man in his wits imagine that ſourneſs is a real quality in vinegar? I cannot therefore but wonder that when Mr. *Hutcheſon (Sect. 2.)* profeſſed that it was his deſign to inveſtigate what it is in objects that occaſions their appearing beautiful to us, he ſhould ever be taxed as contradicting his own hypotheſis, by ſaying it is *uniformity amidſt variety.*

The charge is no more juſt than if becauſe a perſon ſhould ſay that the inteſtine motion of the particles of bodies is the cauſe of heat, he ſhould be repreſented as aſſerting, that heat is a real quality belonging to ſuch bodies themſelves.

Again our author ſays, (*Pag.* 21.) " It is not " to be doubted, but that the univerſe is moſt " regular, moſt harmonious, and moſt beauti- " ful in the ſight of the divine being. Theſe " beauties therefore muſt be real, abſolute and " objective perfections; for whatever the Crea- " tor ſees in his works or ideas, muſt be actual- " ly in them. What they appear to him, that " they are preciſely in themſelves; either " therefore the natural and moral world appear " to the divine mind without beauty, or the

" beauties he perceives in them muſt be real and " inherent." Here I can't but juſt take notice of the unfairneſs of this argument. Our author had before taken notice that order and beauty are therefore amiable in the ſight of God, becauſe they are real perfections; and had acknowledged that all that he had ſaid concerning the Deities regard to order and beauty, was altogether groundleſs, but upon the ſuppoſition that theſe are real and inherent perfections in any object. From whence, I think, one may fairly conclude, that even he himſelf has no other reaſon to believe that God does diſcern any beauty in his works, or makes this a diſtinct end of his acting, but this, *that beauty is an inherent perfection in an object.* To what purpoſe then are the ſcales now turned, and that muſt be made a medium of proof, which before was the concluſion?

Before God could not produce diſorder, and be the author of confuſion; becauſe beauty and order being real perfections in any work, muſt be perceived by him as ſuch, and be amiable in his ſight. *Now* he ſees beauty and order in his works, and therefore they are real perfections in them; which laſt way of arguing is certainly very abſurd, becauſe it is impoſſible that we ſhould know that God can diſcern any quality in an object, but by knowing firſt that it is a quality which does belong to it, unleſs it were by the help of a revelation. We can't know that the works of God appear beautiful to him, but by firſt knowing that they are beautiful in themſelves, and muſt appear ſo to every one that per-

perceives them to be what they are; whilſt this latter therefore is in debate, to take the former for granted is really begging the queſtion that ought to be proved. I am ſenſible, that to doubt, whether the works of God appear beautiful to him or not, muſt appear ſtrange to thoſe that are uſed to conceive of beauty as a real diſtinct perfection in objects themſelves. As to aſſert, that bodies appear without all colour to the divine mind, would for the ſame reaſon appear very ſurprizing to the vulgar; and he that can free himſelf of one of theſe prejudices, may as eaſily get rid of the other.

But I muſt here obſerve, for fear of being miſunderſtood, that I by no means doubt that the works of God are contrived in the moſt exact and regular manner to accompliſh the ends he intended by them; the ſum of which I take to be the happineſs of his creatures. And this may, if you pleaſe, be called the beauty of his works; but without regarding an uſeful end and deſign, I think, there is no manner of reaſon to ſuppoſe, that any particular order and proportion of things appears to the divine mind more excellent and beautiful than another.

But I may here be asked, does confuſion then and diſorder in it ſelf appear as amiable and lovely to him, as order, proportion and harmony? I anſwer, if we ſpeak properly, nothing can appear to him confuſed and diſorderly in it ſelf, without a regard had to the end for which it may be deſigned. Theſe are terms, that have an evident relation to the imperfection of our minds. Let an heap of ſtones be thrown toge-

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ther without any deſign, and there will appear to us no order, no proportion in them; but ſtill there is as real proportion in their ſizes and diſtances, as if they had been ranged by the niceſt hand, ſo as to make the moſt beautiful appearance to us. It is not any order and proportion of the parts of an object that renders it beautiful, as our author ſeems to imagine; for he ſays, *P.* 20. "The eſſentials of beauty are "order, ſymmetry and proportion; without "theſe no works of art are, or can be beauti- "ful; and according to the degree wherein "thoſe prevail, the beauty of theſe is greater "or leſs." But there are only ſome particular orders, and ſome particular proportions of the parts of an object that appear agreeable and beautiful to us. Now, by what medium can we poſſibly prove that ſuch an order, and ſuch proportions in the parts of an object, which renders it moſt beautiful to us, muſt alſo make it appear ſo to the divine mind? eſpecially when we often perceive beauty in an object, without ſo much as knowing what thoſe proportions are which render it agreeable to us; nor till this be done, which has not been ſo much as attempted, can we have any reaſon to believe, that beauty, which in objects themſelves is nothing elſe but a particular order and proportion of their parts, was any diſtinct end in the works of creation and providence.

On this ſingle point the whole controverſy ſeems to me to turn, and therefore I cannot but think it very well deſerves a freſh conſideration from our author. He ſays, the eſſentials of beauty are

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order and proportion; but if I miſtake not, the eſſence of deformity may as truly be aſſerted to be alſo order and proportion. In the ſame ſenſe that one kind of order and proportion conſtitutes beauty, another kind of order and proportion ſeems to conſtitute deformity. Objects are not therefore ugly becauſe they want order and proportion; for theſe as neceſſarily belong to all objects that have parts of the ſame kind, and that may be compared as to ſituation and quantity, as * figure does to all bodies. Divide any object into its ſeveral parts, and place them how you will, they will ſtill be in ſome order or other; though perhaps in that order they may be of no uſe, and make no beautiful appearance. Again, enlarge, leſſen, or change the parts of an object how you pleaſe, ſtill every part muſt be in ſome proportion to the whole, and to every other part. 'Tis true indeed, that we uſually ſay of objects that are deformed, that they want order and proportion; but the meaning of this is, only that they want that order and proportion that is neceſſary to their appearing beautiful to us. And the expreſſion it ſelf is no more proper, than when we call that body ſhapeleſs which is ill-ſhapen.

The reader will obſerve that I uſe the word proportion in that which is the common ſenſe of it, as I apprehend, among all writers (unleſs we muſt except ſome of the mathematicians) to denote the comparative greatneſs of two quantities, in which ſenſe we uſe the word when we

* Figure is nothing elſe, but the order and proportion of the external parts of a body.

ſpeak

ſpeak of the proportion between the circumference and the diameter of the circle; between the height of a building, and its length or breadth, and the like. But I thought it proper to obſerve, that ſome mathematicians uſing the word *ratio* inſtead of proportion in the foregoing ſenſe, define *proportion* to be an *equality of ratios*; becauſe in this ſenſe of the word, it muſt be acknowledged that proportion has a conſiderable effect upon the beauty of an object; but not ſo much as that where there is the ſame proportions in this ſenſe, or the ſame number of equal ratios, there muſt always be the ſame beauty. Take, for inſtance, two humane faces, the one perfectly beautiful, the other exactly like the former in all other reſpects, only let the eyes be too little, the noſe too long, or the noſtrils too wide; and I apprehend, that though theſe muſt needs differ in beauty, yet it will be impoſſible to ſhow that in any ſenſe there is more order or proportion in one than the other. So that it can't be juſtly ſaid, that the eſſence of beauty is order and proportion; or that we have any reaſon to think that every being that perceives the ſame order and proportion in an object, muſt have the ſame ſentiments of its beauty. When I ſay that order and proportion are not the eſſence of beauty, my meaning is, that it is not every order and proportion that conſtitutes beauty, but only ſome; and why theſe rather than others ſhould make a beautiful appearance even to us, we can't aſſign any reaſon; and therefore can't poſſibly conclude, that they muſt raiſe the ſame ſenſe of beauty in every other rational mind

mind that perceives them. But enough has been ſaid on this head, at leaſt to ſhow that our author has given no ſufficient proof of his aſſertion, that a regard to beauty and order was any diſtinct end of the divine being in his works.

Section V.

I proceed therefore now to another aſſertion of our author, which contradicts the opinion of thoſe who ſuppoſe that God has no ends in his actions towards his creatures which are not intirely coincident with their happineſs; which is this, (*P.* 52. *See alſo P.* 33, *&c.*) that "every "inſtance, every degree of ſin, is a juſt ground "for ſuitable puniſhment, whether the ends "and intentions of government require it or "not;" and therefore, that when neither the reformation of the offender himſelf, nor the good of others is deſigned, the deſert of ſin it ſelf is a ſufficient inducement to the divine being to puniſh him in proportion to the greatneſs of his fault.

I ſhould very readily own, that every inſtance, every degree of ſin is a juſt ground for ſuitable puniſhment; becauſe it is for the general happineſs that every ſin ſhould be diſcouraged, and that all the rational creatures of God ſhould be convinced that they can never offend againſt his righteous laws without injuring themſelves. But if a perſon will abſtract from this which is a plain reaſon, and, I think, the only true reaſon of puniſhment; and will ſuppoſe the caſe, that no good is done or deſigned by

puniſhment, he certainly is obliged to aſſign ſome other reaſon for it. In order to do which, our author ſuppoſes that there was but one moral agent in the univerſe, and that he was obſtinately and incorrigibly wicked; and on this ſuppoſition ſays (*P.* 34.) " It is not to be " doubted, but he would feel the effects of his " Maker's diſpleaſure: nay, that there are good " grounds to believe that his puniſhment would " be proportioned to his crimes; and that this " is highly probable on many accounts, and if " he miſtakes not, conformable to the doctrines " both of reaſon and revelation."

I might here, I apprehend, very juſtly queſtion the poſſibility of the fact ſuppoſed by our author, and therefore have ſtill reaſon to doubt of his opinion, tho' it ſhould be a juſt deduction from it. But I don't inſiſt on this; and on the ſuppoſition of the reality of this caſe, I would willingly own that ſuch a being might be puniſhed, as far as this was neceſſary to prevent his future wickedneſs. But this will, I ſuppoſe, be hardly allowed to be any proper puniſhment; becauſe it would be a leſs evil to the criminal himſelf, than his own wickedneſs would have been which is ſuppoſed to be prevented by it. However, 'tis plain this can't come up to our author's intention; for he ſuppoſes (or I ſtrangely miſtake his deſign) that puniſhment may and ought to be inflicted on a wicked perſon meerly on the account of the deſert of ſin, tho' no good were hereby derived to himſelf, or to any one elſe.

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To prove which he argues in the following manner, (*P.* 34.) " If we attend to the princi-
" ple of *divine rectitude*, we ſhall find the Dei-
" ty ever acting, and ever determined to act ac-
" cording to the *reaſon of the thing* and the
" *right of the caſe*. If then it be right and
" reaſonable in it ſelf to puniſh *wickedneſs*, as
" well as to reward *goodneſs*, he will aſſuredly
" do both."

Thus far we have no controverſy, God will aſſuredly reward the virtuous, and puniſh the vitious; as far as it is reaſonable, and fit he ſhould. But what do we learn from hence? He goes on, " If *virtue* be neceſſarily amiable in his ſight,
" *vice* is neceſſarily odious; if there be *merit*
" in the one, which naturally recommends it to
" his favour and eſteem, there is equal *demerit*
" in the other, which unavoidably excites his
" diſpleaſure and indignation." This alſo is allowed, if I rightly underſtand the unuſual phraſes, that there is a merit in virtue that recommends it, and a demerit in ſin that excites indignation againſt it. I ſuppoſe no more is intended by them, than what was as plainly ſaid before, that virtue is neceſſarily amiable, and vice neceſſarily odious. But what is the proper conſequence from this? Is it any thing more than this, that God will therefore take all proper methods to ſecure the cauſe of virtue, and to diſcountenance all ſin and wickedneſs? Certainly it by no means follows, as our author would inſinuate, that therefore it is always in it ſelf morally fit, and agreeable to the rectitude and

ſanctity of the divine nature, to puniſh the vitious and to reward the virtuous; even ſuppoſing the caſe, that ſuch rewards and puniſhments had no tendency to anſwer the ends of the divine government, which are the promoting virtue and happineſs. A love to *virtue* can't diſpoſe a perſon to reward, but with a deſign to promote and encourage *virtue*. An hatred of *vice* can't diſpoſe a perſon to puniſh, but with a deſign to diſcourage and diſcountenance *vice*. We may be very great enemies to vice, and yet not be enemies to vitious men, or inclined to hurt them, any further than an oppoſition to their vices may make it neceſſary. Otherwiſe no good chriſtian could be a virtuous man, ſince with the greateſt averſion to ſin he is obliged to maintain the moſt real benevolence towards ſinful men. And if this be commanded us as our conſtant duty, I can't ſee how we can aſſert that it is inconſiſtent with the divine rectitude to ſhow mercy to ſinners, and to make them experience the effects of his benevolence, where this can be done without prejudicing the cauſe of virtue and goodneſs. But " ſhould God " communicate good, and finally diſpenſe happineſs to all deſerving or undeſerving promiſcuouſly; how could he be ſaid upon this ſuppoſition to act according to the true nature, " and reaſon of things? Virtue and Vice are " eſſentially oppoſite, and therefore it is not " poſſible that the ſame treatment ſhould ſuit the " votaries of each." (*P.* 35.) It is here readily acknowledged, that it would not be right to communicate

municate happineſs equally to all ſorts of perſons without any difference, that it would not be right to give as great rewards to the evil as to the good. Such a procedure would not be treating perſons according to their real character, nor the way moſt effectually to promote virtue and happineſs. But what is all this to the point in view, which was to ſhow, that without a regard to the deterring from ſin, there is ſufficient reaſon to puniſh bad men? Is there not as great a difference made between the virtuous and the vitious, as any wiſe and good being would deſire; if the virtuous are always rewarded for what they do well, and the vitious are always puniſhed, where their puniſhment is conducive to the general good and neceſſary to deter from ſin? Is not the very reaſon why virtuous and vitious men ſhould be treated differently, that virtue ought to be encouraged and vice diſcountenanced? And therefore where theſe ends are out of the queſtion, there does not appear any reaſon from theſe oppoſite characters for an oppoſite treatment. But can we ſuppoſe that God would ſuffer an incorrigible ſinner to go unpuniſhed, when the quite contrary is deſerved? Is not this eſſentially repugnant to the rectitude and purity of his nature?

I don't apprehend that God will ſuffer any impenitent ſinner to go unpuniſhed, but not meerly becauſe this is deſerved; for then no ſin muſt go unpuniſhed: but becauſe his puniſhment is neceſſary to ſecure the reſpect due to the divine laws. And ſuppoſing this end out of

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the queſtion, no one can ſay, that meerly the deſerving puniſhment is a ſufficient reaſon for its being inflicted, that will allow any room for the exerciſe of pardoning mercy and grace.

As for what our author ſays, after having repreſented a moſt villainous character, which he deſires us to reflect upon without the emotions of reſentment, *viz.* that the moſt merciful man in the world would pronounce ſentence upon ſuch an offender, and give him up to condign puniſhment; it is not improbable that this would be true in fact, becauſe the moſt merciful man in the world has his reſentments; and it is impoſſible, but he ſhould believe there would be good conſequences from puniſhing ſuch a perſon. But if we could ſuppoſe the contrary, that ſparing him would certainly do no hurt, that puniſhing would do no good, I can by no means be of our author's opinion, that to ſpare would not be goodneſs, but weakneſs. For what weakneſs is it to ſpare, when all the reaſons of puniſhment are ſuppoſed away? His reaſon for it, that to ſpare would be violating truth and nature, and acting contrary to the plaineſt reaſons of things, is only a more faſhionable way of ſaying that he is very poſitive, 'twould be exceeding wrong; for he does not tell us one truth that would be violated by it, nor give us one of thoſe plaineſt reaſons, which ſhould perſuade us to a contrary conduct. And I am ſatisfied I ſhould be far from being ſingular if I ſhould deliver my opinion on the oppoſite ſide of the queſtion, in the ſame way with our au-

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thor, that to give pain to any ſenſible being where no good end is anſwer'd by it, nor any miſchief prevented, is violating truth and nature, and acting contrary to the plaineſt reaſons of things; 'tis certainly acting a miſchievous and ill-natured part.

Section VI.

There is only one opinion more of our author, which, I think, it is needful to take notice of, as ſeeming too much to confine the divine goodneſs, and ſupported by no reaſon; and that is, "that it is not conſiſtent with the di-"vine rectitude to beſtow that ſupreme felicity, "that indefectible ſtate, wherein conſiſt the re-"wards of the righteous on any that have not "firſt gone through a ſtate of probation," *P.* 46. Which is as much as to ſay, that God can't, conſiſtently with his own attributes, create any being in ſuch a degree of perfection, that he ſhould be in no more danger of falling from his favour, than good men will be after death.

This propoſition, I am ſure, muſt appear at firſt view ſo inconſiſtent with our notions of the boundleſs goodneſs of God, that it can't be expected we ſhould admit it without the plaineſt proof. 'Tis acknowledged by all, that God may beſtow what favour he pleaſes on his creatures, antecedently to their doing any thing to deſerve it. Why may he not then make creatures with the moſt pure and uncorrupt affections, and with ſuch a large and diſtinct knowledge of the nature

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of things, as to diſcern the connection between virtue and their own intereſt, as plainly as we know by experience the connection between eating and living? Now only allow that beings may be created thus perfect; and there will be no more danger of their falling, than there is that a man in his wits, for no reaſon at all, ſhould thruſt his hand into the midſt of the fire, that is, there will be no danger of it at all. And if you deny this, how can you acknowledge that God may grant what favours he pleaſes to his creatures? Yea, if no beings were at firſt made thus perfect, what will become of the beauty of that ſcale of beings which our author ſpeaks of, the higheſt of which was in danger of falling below the condition of the meaneſt ſenſible being, that is, into a ſtate of miſery? And is it not wrong in us to preſume ſo far to limit the divine goodneſs, as to ſay that he can't beſtow on any a favour that is perfect and compleat before they have deſerv'd it, which it's plain no favour can be whilſt there is any hazard of loſing it?

But let us hear what our author ſays to juſtify this ſurprizing poſition. "Perfect happi-
"neſs (he ſays, *P.* 41.) was and ought to be
"reſerved for the proper objects of God's love
"and favour; which none of his creatures
"could be without virtuous qualifications and
"moral merit: and theſe imply a ſtate of proba-
"tion." That as to confer the ſame happineſs on the *faithful*, and on the *unfaithful* and *diſobedient*, would be a manifeſt violation of truth

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and nature; ſo "by parity of reaſon it was mo-
"rally unfit to treat thoſe who had never been
"*tried*, and by conſequence merited nothing;
"in the ſame manner as if they had been tried
"and found faithful; becauſe ſuch perſons are
"in a moral ſenſe *worthleſs*, and by conſe-
"quence are in a ſtation as much below *merit*
"as it is above *demerit*." I have given, I apprehend, the full ſtrength of our author's argument; and before I come to give an anſwer to it, I find it neceſſary to ſay ſomewhat in order to ſettle the meaning of the terms here made uſe of by him, on the ambiguity of which, if I miſtake not, all the ſeeming ſtrength of his reaſoning intirely depends.

Firſt then, let us enquire what we are to underſtand by *virtuous qualifications*; theſe cannot here ſignify meerly good diſpoſitions, and ſuch valuable qualifications of temper, as fit a perſon for the greateſt ſerviceableneſs to himſelf and others. Even though a perſon have the ſtrongeſt deſires to promote the honour of the Creator, and the kindeſt affection towards his fellow creatures; if theſe ariſe from his original make, and are not acquired by himſelf with ſome difficulty, they are not according to our author virtuous qualifications; for theſe, he ſays, imply a ſtate of probation, *i. e.* a ſtate of difficulty and temptation. By virtuous qualifications therefore, I ſuppoſe, he muſt mean, what I would call, in oppoſition to thoſe good diſpoſitions which we receive more directly from our Creator, *acquired virtues*.

The next word, that needs explication, is that of *moral merit*; by this he cannot mean only real worth and excellency; for that does not neceſſarily imply a ſtate of probation. But by moral merit we muſt, I apprehend, underſtand *a right to a reward*, or that which gives ſuch a right; in which ſenſe of the word, I allow it can't be applied to any untried creatures. Thoſe creatures, which by their original make are ſo conſtituted, that their deſires and their duty always neceſſarily coincide, can't, I think, be ſaid to have any claim to a reward: whereas thoſe who are ſurrounded with difficulty and temptation, and who are obliged to deny themſelves and ſubmit to great inconveniencies that they may maintain their integrity, if notwithſtanding this, they do behave uprightly, ſeem on this account to have an equitable claim to it, which they may deduce from this principle; that a wiſe and good God will certainly, in every inſtance, make it the intereſt of his creatures to behave virtuouſly. In this ſenſe therefore creatures only in a ſtate of probation can be ſaid to merit.

I am ſenſible that to many it will ſeem abſurd to ſay that a creature can any ways merit at the hands of God; and I confeſs, that in that ſenſe in which men by ſhowing kindneſs to each other merit a return of favour, it is abſurd to ſay that any being whatſoever can merit at the divine hands. It ſeems alſo plain to me, that in particular the happineſs that is promiſed to the righteous in the goſpel, cannot be looked upon

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as what they are capable of meriting by their obedience. Perfect and unalterable happineſs is really of infinite value; and therefore cannot but appear as a reward greatly diſproportionate to the temporary ſervices of any creatures, and much more ſo to the imperfect obedience of men in this ſhort life. So that if none muſt receive but according to their merit, which is the principle on which, if I miſtake not, all our author's reaſoning depends; mankind muſt for ever deſpair of a ſtate of perfect and unalterable happineſs. But if we take the word *merit* in the ſenſe before mentioned, as ſignifying an equitable claim to a reward, *i. e.* to a reward proportional to the difficulty of performing, or the inconvenience that is ſubmitted to in the performance of any virtuous action; in this ſenſe, I think, a perſon may be ſaid to merit, and thus it is plain he can merit only in a ſtate of probation. And in analogy to this ſenſe of the word muſt we underſtand that very harſh aſſertion of our author, that all beings that have not undergone a ſtate of trial, are in *a moral ſenſe worthleſs*, viz. that they have no proper claim to a reward. For in any other ſenſe, nothing can be more ſtrangely abſurd, than to ſay that any creature is therefore in a moral ſenſe worthleſs, becauſe he was always poſſeſſed of ſo much wiſdom and goodneſs as not to be in danger of offending, *i. e.* becauſe he is moſt like the infinitely perfect being.

Theſe things being obſerved, the foremen-

tioned argument may be anſwered with very little difficulty. I readily allow, that perfect happineſs will be given only to the proper objects of God's love, and favour, and eſteem; but in order to theſe acquired virtues and moral merit, in the ſenſe before explained, are not, I apprehend, abſolutely neceſſary. For good diſpoſitions and inclinations, a right temper and byaſs of mind, are of themſelves a juſt foundation for love, favour, and eſteem; though they don't ſeem to give a perſon a proper title to a reward. Nor does it follow, that becauſe one has undergone the ſevereſt trials and overcome in them, that therefore he is a better and more valuable perſon than another that has not been thus tried; and conſequently this latter may poſſibly have as much of the divine favour and eſteem, as the former. We indeed can only value perſons from their actions, becauſe 'tis by this means only we form a judgment of their internal temper; but he, who immediately diſcerns the inward diſpoſitions of the mind, can have no reaſon to wait till theſe be diſcovered by external actions, in order to know where his love and eſteem ſhould be fixed. Eſteem, if I miſtake not, ought always to be proportional to the good qualities of which a perſon is poſſeſſed, however theſe have been acquired; for *to have one in due eſteem*, is to apprehend him to be what he really is in himſelf. And where a perſon is juſtly eſteemed for his good diſpoſitions of mind, it

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can be no reaſon againſt granting him any favours which he is not likely to abuſe, that he has no juſt claim to them as the reward of his actions. But, ſays our author, " if re-
" wards are due to the righteous, and puniſh-
" ments to the wicked; thoſe who have never
" been tried can deſerve neither, and therefore
" cannot, agreeably to truth and rectitude, be
" treated like either of the other." As this argument ſtands, the utmoſt that it can prove is, that an untried perſon ought neither to be rewarded nor puniſhed; which is very different from that which he undertook to prove, that ſuch an one ought not, through the undeſerved goodneſs of God, to be made partaker of perfect happineſs. But if this argument had been intended to have proved the point in view, it ſhould have run in the following manner:

If perfect and unalterable happineſs be due to the righteous as the reward of their ſervices in a ſtate of probation, and miſery be the juſt portion of the wicked; thoſe who have never been tried, and conſequently have deſerved neither, ought not to be treated like either of the other, *i. e.* ought not to be made either perfectly happy, or miſerable. But in anſwer to this, I ſay, *perfect* happineſs is not due to the righteous as the reward of their ſervices; 'tis not on the merits of their own works, but on the gracious promiſe of God, through Chriſt, that their expectation of this is founded: and therefore, ſince they at laſt muſt not receive it, but as an undeſerved

deſerved favour; why mayn't the ſame favour be conferred on others that are equally fitted for it, though ſuppoſed unequal to them in merit? Nor would it follow, if we could ſuppoſe a perſon capable of meriting perfect happineſs; that therefore it ſhould be beſtowed on none, but thoſe that do thus merit it; and that no room ſhould be left for the exerciſe of undeſerved favour. Becauſe one has a juſt claim upon me, that is no reaſon why I may not freely give to another, even more than what the former can in juſtice demand.

'Tis a mighty weak way of arguing, to ſay that two perſons ought not to be treated alike, that is, that they ſhould not both receive the ſame happineſs; becauſe one has a particular claim to it, which the other has not: if one has merit, he will receive according to his merit, and when this is done, with regard to undeſerved favours, he ſtands upon a level with the other creatures of God; and it is no abſurdity to ſuppoſe, that it may in ſome caſes at leaſt ſeem good to his infinite wiſdom to beſtow theſe in the largeſt proportions on thoſe that have not the greateſt merit. Yea, as I think that none can deny, that God has a right to make a difference between the conditions of his creatures by his undeſerved goodneſs, without any regard to their merits; ſo none can pretend to fix the bounds beyond which the difference hence ariſing ought not to proceed; and therefore we can't

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poſſibly have any reaſon to aſſert, that God may not give ſome creatures greater happineſs before they have merited it by any actual obedience in a ſtate of trial; than what it is poſſible for others to gain by their merit.

But is not this to repreſent the divine being as acting in an arbitrary manner, and as having a particular fondneſs for ſome more than others without any reaſon at all? I anſwer, this no more follows from what I have ſaid, than from the common opinion, that God has originally made creatures of different ranks and capacities for happineſs. A man, for inſtance, has no more reaſon to complain of any arbitrary or partial proceeding in the divine being, though with all his boaſted merit he ſhould not be able to attain the happineſs of angels; than a brute can complain that he is utterly uncapable even of that happineſs, which men may enjoy in this life. But all that follows from what I have aſſerted is, that God has other reaſons for beſtowing happineſs upon, and for diverſifying the happineſs of his creatures, beſides a regard to their merit; which is what every one muſt allow that will not run contrary to the plaineſt matter of fact, as far as we are capable of judging concerning it. Beſides this argument drawn from the divine equity, our author adds another taken from the natural connexion between virtue and happineſs. Says he, ſupreme felicity is the peculiar portion of thoſe that have gone through a ſtate of probation,

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" partly by God's appointment; and partly " from the very nature of the thing; for ſince " a ſtate of probation is neceſſary for the ex- " erciſe and improvement of virtue, it is by " conſequence neceſſary for the conſummation " and perfection of happineſs." That good or virtuous diſpoſitions, and actions are neceſſary to the perfection of happineſs is moſt certainly true: but I muſt confeſs, I can't imagine what our author intends by *virtue*; when he ſays that a ſtate of probation, *i. e.* a ſtate of temptation is neceſſary for the improvement, and even the exerciſe of it. Does the ignorance of men's minds, the irregularity of their affections, the external difficulties and temptations they meet with, which are what render the preſent a ſtate of trial, give them any advantage for improvement in virtue? Or rather are not theſe very things hindrances to their progreſs in it? Are not theſe the reaſon that almoſt all men in this life are ſo very imperfect in virtue? But however this be, it is, I apprehend, certain, that but few even of good men do in this life arrive at that perfection in virtue, as without any farther improvement in it will fit them for a ſtate of compleat happineſs; ſo that if there can be no improvement after they have gone through this ſtate of probation, I don't ſee how they can ever be capable of a ſtate of the moſt perfect felicity. And if good men after death are capable of increaſing in goodneſs and virtue, it can't be ſaid that a ſtate

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of trial is neceſſary for this purpoſe; and therefore ſuch a ſuppoſed neceſſity can be no ſolid objection againſt God's placing ſome creatures in a ſtate of perfect happineſs without obliging them firſt to go through the dangers, and temptations of a ſtate of probation.

Section VII.

I have now gone through the ſeveral poſitions of our author, which ſeemed to me to contradict the notion of ſuch as ſuppoſe that God has no other deſign in his diſpenſations towards his creatures but their happineſs; and I hope, that what has been ſaid ſufficiently ſhows that he has not proved his point in a ſingle inſtance. There is however one conſiderable objection ſtill remaining againſt the opinion I have defended, which I have hitherto taken no notice of; becauſe though adduced by our author in ſupport of his notion of the divine Being's having a regard to the beauty and order of his works, as an end intirely diſtinct from the happineſs of his creatures; it is not ſo properly a proof of his particular opinion with regard to beauty, as a general objection againſt his adverſaries notion of happineſs being the only end of God in his works; and for this reaſon I thought proper to defer the conſideration of it to this place. The objection is, that if happineſs had been the only end of God in his works, the greateſt poſſible quan-

tities of it muſt have been produced at all times, and in all places; and it is thus urged by our author (*P.* 14.) " Had the production " of *happineſs* been the ſole end which the " Creator had in view, it is not, I think, to " be doubted, but the utmoſt poſſibilities of " it would have been produced at all times " and in all places. But as far as we are " capable of judging from the *phænomena* " within our reach, this ſeems not to be the " caſe. That ſcale and ſubordination of be- " ings beforementioned, may ſeem to pro- " mote the *order* and harmony of the world " more than the happineſs of its inhabitants. " Had their ſeveral powers been more nearly " equal, what would have been the reſult? " It ſeems probable that the latter of theſe " ends would have been advanced; and the " former obſtructed, if not deſtroyed." This is indeed at firſt view a very difficult objection; that ſmall degree of happineſs, that evil we ſee in the world, has been ſtrongly urged againſt thoſe that have believed that the world is governed by a wiſe, and powerful, and good God. But I hope it will not oblige us to let go this important truth; or incline us to imagine that the Deity is influenced by any principles of acting, that contradict his goodneſs.

In order to ſolve this objection, it will be proper firſt to enquire, whether the Divine Being was obliged by any of his perfections to create any beings at all. Indeed after,

after a univerſe of creatures is formed, his goodneſs ſeems to incline him to confer the greateſt happineſs upon it, of which it is capable; but it does not appear that even goodneſs it ſelf obliged him to make thoſe creatures. Creation is an argument of the goodneſs of God; becauſe he would not have made any creatures at all, if he had not intended to communicate happineſs to them; but I queſtion whether in ſtrict propriety it is always an inſtance of it. An act of goodneſs, one would think ſhould require that the object of it ſhould before exiſt; but as this argument may appear too ſubtle, and as I can't my ſelf lay any great ſtreſs upon it, I only juſt hint at it, that the reader may further conſider it, or paſs it over, as he thinks fit. But I think we may more ſecurely conclude, that God was not obliged by any of his perfections to create, at leaſt not to create the univerſe in any particular degree of perfection, from the conſequences that neceſſarily follow from ſuch a ſuppoſition. Should we, for inſtance, ſuppoſe that the divine goodneſs obliged him to make a world, that there might be creatures to whom he might communicate happineſs; the conſequence of this ſeems plainly to be, that a univerſe muſt have been from eternity, in which there muſt have been the greateſt poſſible happineſs. Nor, if we ſhould go upon our author's hypotheſis, that the influence of the divine goodneſs is limited by his regard to the order and beauty of his works,

ſhall we be able to avoid the main part of this difficulty.

For if, notwithſtanding a regard to order and beauty, the divine perfections did at any time oblige him to create; in every inſtant before that time there muſt have been the ſame obligation upon him, from his perfections, to have formed a moſt perfect and beautiful, though not a moſt happy world. It muſt follow alſo, even upon his hypotheſis, that the world muſt be infinite as well as eternal, for no regard to beauty can ſet bounds to it; and that every creature muſt enjoy as much happineſs as is conſiſtent with the perfection of the whole; and that no more can poſſibly be created without deſtroying this perfection.

But as theſe conſequences, particularly the laſt, are what I ſhould by no means be willing to defend, I cannot entertain a favourable opinion of the principle from which they flow; and I think our author himſelf ought herein to agree with me, as he is in opinion for the * non eternity of the world. I know it is uſually preſumed that all the works of God are moſt perfect; and thus they undoubtedly are, if by this be meant, that they are exactly agreeable to the higheſt goodneſs and wiſdom, and have nothing in them that implies want of perfection in their author. But that the univerſe has ſuch a degree and quantity of perfection, as that no addition

* *Letter to a Deiſt*, p. 7.

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can poſſibly be made to it even by infinite wiſdom and power, ſeems to me ſo far from being what we ought to ſuppoſe true; that I queſtion whether the notion it ſelf be not perfectly unintelligible. It is certain, that to ſpeak of the greateſt poſſible number, or the greateſt poſſible triangle, is to uſe words without any meaning at all.

A triangle may be made as large as you pleaſe, yet the largeſt poſſible cannot be; for ſuch a one could not be a triangle, which is a ſurface bounded with three ſtrait lines. In like manner we may, I apprehend, ſpeak in relation to the happineſs and perfection of the univerſe. God may make it as happy, and as perfect as he pleaſes, and may continually increaſe this in any proportion he thinks fit; but ſtill I apprehend 'tis capable of this increaſe, without limits, and without end; and that to ſuppoſe the greateſt poſſible quantity of happineſs or perfection diffuſed through it, is to ſuppoſe that there is a certain fixed and determinate quantity of happineſs and perfection, beyond which it is impoſſible, even for the power of God to proceed; which I muſt own ſeems to me abſurd. So that to argue againſt the goodneſs of God, becauſe there is not the greateſt quantity of happineſs and perfection in the univerſe, is to uſe an argument that can have no force, ſince, if put into form, one of the premiſes is unintelligible. I add moreover, that if it be a contradiction to

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ſuppoſe that the univerſe ſhould be abſolutely moſt perfect, or moſt happy, ſo as to be incapable of further improvement, even from infinite wiſdom and power; we can ſee no poſſible reaſon, [illegible] amongſt the ſeveral degrees of perfection that might have been communicated, one ſhould be choſen rather than another; for if one ought not to be choſen becauſe there is another greater conceivable, for the ſame reaſon this ought alſo to be rejected, and ſo on for ever. And on this account we muſt be forced, I think, to acknowledge, that, for any thing we know to the contrary, God was not obliged to create the univerſe with any particular degree or quantity of perfection, or even to create it at all; and if this be true, 'tis very far from being a juſt conſequence that God muſt be influenced by other principles that contradict his goodneſs, becauſe we don't find the greateſt poſſible happineſs at all times and in all places. I have inſiſted ſomething the longer on this point, becauſe I take this to be the true anſwer to the objection beforementioned; and alſo becauſe, if what has been ſaid be true, it will make the ſolution much eaſier of many difficulties that are raiſed againſt the divine diſpenſations. If we conceive of the goodneſs of God as an unbounded inclination to create happineſs, and conſequently ſuppoſe he has made the world as happy and as perfect as he poſſibly could, there are undoubtedly abun-

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dance of *phænomena*, the conſiſtence of which with this ſuppoſition we cannot diſcern, and which we ſhall find ſome difficulty to perſwade men are not incompatible with it: But if we only conceive of the divine goodneſs as a moſt kind affection towards his creatures, and as inclining him to confer upon that univerſe of creatures he has made the greateſt happineſs of which they are capable, ſtill ſuppoſing that their original capacities for happineſs were fixed by his will and pleaſure, we ſhall find it much eaſier to ſatisfy our ſelves, that there is nothing in any of the appearances of providence contrary to the moſt perfect goodneſs of the divine nature.

But though, I think, the way I have already taken is really the proper way of anſwering our author's objection; yet, as I am ſenſible many will not readily come into it, I ſhall now make the moſt favourable ſuppoſition on his ſide, and ſee whether even then his argument will not admit of a fair anſwer. I will allow, that the conſequence of ſuppoſing the Deity influenced by benevolence only, and no other principle contrary to it, is, that the univerſe muſt be created in the moſt perfect manner, and that the greateſt poſſible quantity of happineſs muſt be diffuſed through it; for even upon the ſuppoſition of the juſtneſs of this conſequence, nothing that appears in the divine conduct towards his creatures, will oblige us to allow that the Deity is influenced by any other principle

ciple of acting that contradicts or limits his benevolence. Our author supposes, that if the end of God in his works was only the good of his creatures, there must have been the greatest quantity of happiness communicated at all times, and in all places; and therefore that the universe must have been perfectly uniform, without any variety, and consequently without any beauty and order. For which reason he imagines that the world was formed in a different manner; but this is a consequence he can never possibly make good. All that can be imagined to follow from the most unbounded goodness, is, that the greatest quantity of happiness should be communicated to the universe; but it no ways appears that this must arise from the same happiness at all times, and in all places. Such a perfect uniformity may, for any thing we know to the contrary, be as inconsistent with the greatest happiness of the whole, as it is with its beauty. If the universe were to consist of one uniform sort of beings, however happy they might be, 'tis evident that they could not in some respects enjoy so great happiness as they might by variety; there would then be but one uniform object of contemplation, one uniform relation among all the creatures of the universe; which could never afford so great happiness as variety of these to intelligent and rational creatures, whose happiness is in a great measure derived from objects of contemplation

templation, and the relations they ſtand in to one another. Hence, I think, 'tis very plain, that from the greateſt variety imaginable obſerved between the degrees of happineſs beſtowed on the ſeveral creatures of God, a defect of happineſs in the whole cannot be inferred.

Beſides this, it ought to be conſidered, that a moſt happy univerſe is ſo far from implying the ſame happineſs in all creatures; and thereby contradicting that variety which is neceſſary to beauty; that the quite contrary is implyed in it: For the moſt happy univerſe is not one that conſiſts of the greateſt poſſible number of the moſt happy beings only; but one that conſiſts of that, and the greateſt poſſible number of beings next inferior to the firſt rank, and ſo downward, till we come to thoſe that approach the neareſt to inſenſible matter. This certainly muſt be allowed, unleſs it can be proved that the greateſt poſſible number of the moſt happy beings having been created, no others can poſſibly be made. So that a moſt happy univerſe is ſo far from being unbeautifully uniform, that it muſt be moſt beautifully various; a moſt regular and orderly advance of perfection being made from inſenſible matter, *without breaking the ſcale of beings*, quite up to the higheſt poſſible rank. Strange therefore it is, that any, becauſe he only ſees the loweſt part of this ſcale, ſhould from hence infer a defect of happineſs in the whole, and imagine a neceſſity of aſſerting another principle of acting in the Deity,

which in a great meaſure hinders thoſe communications of goodneſs that would otherwiſe have been diſpenſed. To me it ſeems plain, that even upon this ſuppoſition we can have no reaſon to conclude, that the Deity has any other intention in his actions towards his creatures beſides their good.

And I cannot but apprehend, that every perſon that wiſhes well to his fellow creatures, muſt be pleaſed to ſee there is ſo little reaſon to ſupport an opinion, which if true would render all our expectations of happineſs perfectly precarious and uncertain. To ſuppoſe that the almighty and infinitely wiſe governor of the world, who can do what he will with his creatures, has ends of acting any ways inconſiſtent with their general happineſs, muſt needs be a very uneaſy and uncomfortable reflection to every truly good and benevolent mind; eſpecially as it is confeſſed, that we know not particularly what theſe ends are, and how far they may prevail. But to look upon God as the tender father of his creatures, as in all his actions towards them, not excepting thoſe of judgment and vengeance, conſulting the general happineſs, is to repreſent him to our ſelves under a notion the moſt amiable and lovely that can be imagined. Separate infinite goodneſs from almighty power and perfect knowledge, and the idea is only awful and terrible; but that theſe are neceſſarily conjoined in the glo-

rious

rious Author of our beings, renders him the object of our moſt delightful contemplation as well as of our higheſt reverence. That the governor of the world is the beſt as well as the greateſt of all beings, is the ſupport of a good man under all his troubles; this is his comfort and joy under all the evils he obſerves in this preſent ſtate; this is his moſt powerful engagement to his duty, and gives him the greateſt delight and ſatisfaction in acts of obedience and devotion. Yea, would ſinners themſelves be perſwaded rightly to conſider this attribute of the Divine Being; would they look upon God, though not as fond and partial, with reſpect to particular perſons, to the general detriment of his creatures; yet as truly benevolent to them all, nothing could be more proper to make them aſhamed of their diſobedience, and thereby lead them to the trueſt repentance. And I may add, that in reaſon nothing can make them more afraid of continuing in a courſe of vice and wickedneſs; for whilſt God is good the cauſe of virtue and goodneſs muſt be maintained and ſupported, which neceſſarily requires that ſin ſhould be puniſhed, as well as that virtue ſhould be honoured and rewarded.

ERRATA.

PAge 22. line 4. dele *to*. P. 43. l. 17. for *by* read *for*. P. 44. l. 28. for *can diſcern* r. *diſcerns*. P. 46. l. 20. for *renders* r. *render*. P. 48. l. 11. for *is* r. *are*.

FINIS.

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